

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM USINT HAVANA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2101
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
USLO PEKING

C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 1519

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDEV MILI CH UR CU ET CG
SUBJ: CHINESE DOWNPLAY CUBAN CRITICISM

REF: A. HAVANA 1476; B. HAVANA 1499, C. HAVANA 1507

1. CHINESE AMBASSADOR LI SHAN-YI TOLD ACTING USINT CHIEF, JUNE 2 THAT GRANMA ATTACKS ON CHINE (MAY 31, JUNE 2) APPEARED, AT FIRST GLANCE, NOT TO HEIGHTEN LEVEL OF RHETORIC USED BY FIDEL CASTRO AGAINST PRC IN SERIES OF 1976 INTERVIEWS. SHEER VOLUME OF CRITICISM, HOWEVER, WAS UNUSUAL. ONLY TIME WILL TELL, LI SAID, WHETHER CUBAN ATTACKS MARK NEW STAGE IN CUBAN HOSTILITY TOWARD CHINA. (COMMENT: USINT BELIEVES THAT CHINESE ARE DELIBERATELY SEEKING TO DOWNPLAY SHARPNESS OF CUBAN CRITICISM. YUGOSLAV EMBASSY HERE, HAS REMARED, CORRECTLY WE BELIEVE, THAT GRANMA ATTACKS REPRESENT "DECLARATION OF WAR" AGAINST CHINA.)

2. LI ADDED THAT CUBAN ATTACKS COINCIDED WITH HEIGHTENING OF SOVIET AND EASTERN EUROPEAN CRITICISM OF PEKING. BUT, HE ADDED, HE SENSED THAT ATTACKS WERE DIRECTED AS MUCH
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AGAINST US AS AGAINST CHINA. LI SAID THAT HE BELIEVED THAT GRANMA ARTICLES, WHILE CONTAINING SOVIET-ORIGIN MATERIAL, WERE PROBABLY WRITTEN BY MEMBERS OF SPECIAL DEPARTMENT OF CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF CUBAN COMMUNIST PARTY, SET UP UNDER SPERVISION OF VICE-PRESIDENT CARLOS RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ TO STUDY CHINA. (COMMENT: CARLOS RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ IS A PRE-REVOLUTIONARY, MOSCOW-LINE COMMUNIST. OTHER DIPLOMATIC

SOURCES HERE HAVE SPECULATED THAT VICE-MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS PELEGRIN TORRAS, ALSO AN OLD-LINE COMMUNIST, WHOSE RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDE ASIA, HAD A HAND IN PREPARING ATTACKS.) LI, QUOTING CHAIRMAN MAO, ADDED THAT "CRITICISM BY ENEMY IS GOOD" AND THAT CHINESE PEOPLE, WHO HAD BEEN THREATENED BY GUNS AND BOMBS, WOULD NOT BE PREVENTED FROM "UNMASKING" CUBANS BY WORDS.

3. LI ACKNOWLEDGED THAT CHINA HAD INCREASED TRADE WITH CUBA IN 1978, BUT CLAIMED THAT THIS WAS DONE FOR ECONOMIC, NOT POLITICAL REASONS. LI ASSERTED THAT, WHILE CHINA DOES NOT TRADE WITH COUNTRIES IT DOES NOT RECOGNIZE, IT DOES NOT GENERALLY LINK TRADE WITH POLITICS. (COMMENT: LI REMARKED THAT HIS RETURN TO CUBA IN FEBRUARY, AND HIS ABSENCE FROM ISLAND AFTER OCTOBER 1977, WERE NOT DUE TO POLITICAL REASONS. HE SAID HE HAD BEEN VISITING IN CHINA ONLY TO RECUPERATE FROM ILLNESS AND TO TAKE VACATION.)

4. ASKED WHY THIRD INSTALLMENT OF CUBAN ATTACK (REF C) HAD FOCUSED SO MUCH ATTENTION ON CHINESE THREAT TO VIETNAM, LI REPLIED THAT CUBANS WERE PREPARED TO SEIZE ON "ANYTHING" IN ORDER TO JUSTIFY THEIR ATTACK. (COMMENT: LI IMPLIED THAT SINO-VIETNAM QUARREL WAS NOT A MATTER OF GREAT SIGNIFICANCE. ACTING USINT CHIEF ASKED SOVIET AMBASSADOR TOLUBEYEV, JUNE 2, WHETHER ANYTHING IMPORTANT IS EXPECTED TO HAPPEN IN VIETNAM. TOLUBEYEV SAID, "ASK THE CHINESE".) CONFIDENTIAL

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5. TURNING TO CUBANS IN AFRICA, LI EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER FUTURE INTENTIONS OF ZAIRE "MERCENARIES" (KATANGA GENDARMES). HE ASKED (PRESUMABLY WITH HUANG HUA'S VISIT TO KINSHASA IN MIND) WHETHER "MERCENARIES" WERE EXPECTED TO ATTACK AGAIN AND WHAT WEST WAS PREPARED TO DO IN THIS EVENT. ACTING USINT CHIEF POINTED TO UPCOMING PARIS MEETING AS LIKELY TO PROVIDE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS. ON HUANG HUA VISIT TO ZAIRE LI CRYPTICALLY STATED THAT CHINESE WOULD ACT, BUT ON BASIS OF "NON-INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS". (COMMENT: THIS MAY REFER TO POSSIBLE PROVISION OF SUPPORT TO MOBUTU FOR DEFENSE AGAINST KATANGA "MERCENARIES" - THAT IS, ELEMENTS BEHOLDEN TO OUTSIDE POWERS.)

6. ON ERITREA, LI ASSERTED THAT, REGARDLESS OF PROCLAIMED INTENTIONS, SOVIETS AND CUBANS WOULD MOVE TO SEIZE TERRITORY SINCE ERITREA'S TWO PORTS ARE VITAL TO MOSCOW'S "EFFORT TO CONTROL SEA ACCESS TO WESTERN EUROPE." LI COMPARED CURRENT CUBAN CLAIMS OF NON-INVOLVEMENT (WHICH HE DISCOUNTED, CLAIMING THAT CUBANS ARE, IN FACT, PARTICIPATING IN COMBAT) TO OLD CHINESE FABLE ABOUT MAN WHO KILLS KING AFTER CONCEALING HIS SWORD WITHIN A GIFT (A ROLLED-UP MAP).

7. LI, HOWEVER, SAID THAT, DESPITE CUBAN CRITICISM OF CHINA AND ACTIONS IN AFRICA, HE REMAINED A "REVOLUTIONARY OPTIMIST", BELIEVING THAT CUBAN LEADERSHIP WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO FOOL POPULACE FOREVER. (LI CITED UNFORTUNATE EXAMPLE OF GOEBBELS WHO, HE CLIAKED ERRONEOUSLY, HAD NOT SUCCEEDED IN "FOOLING" GERMAN PEOPLE.)

8. COMMENT: WHILE CHINESE ARE SEEKING TO MAINTAIN CALM EXTERIOR, THEY UNDOUBTEDLY MUST RECOGNIZE THAT GRANMA ATTACKS REPRESENT EXTREMELY SHARP ESCALATION OF CUBAN CAMPAIGN AGAINST CHINA. (FYI EDITORIALS COVERED ALMOST ENTIRE FRONT PAGE OF SIX PAGE GRANMA FOR THREE CONSECUTIVE DAYS. END FYI) UNLESS CHINESE TOTALLY DISCOUNT POSSIBILITY
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THAT CUBANS WERE ACTING AS STALKING HORSE FOR SOVIETS, THEY MUST BE PREOCCUPIED BY THE EXTRAORDINARY VOLUME AND VIRULENCE OF HAVANA'S ASSAULT.
GLASSMAN

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